DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 319 PS 015 040

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TITLE Some Characteristics of Early Childhood Teacher Training Programs in Canadian Institutions.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Attitudes; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Interviews; *Needs Assessment; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Evaluation; Questionnaires; Rating Scales; Supervisors; Surveys; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Educators; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

A survey was made across Canada of English-language preservice training programs for teachers who will be certified to teach, among others, children enrolled in an early childhood program the year prior to compulsory education. The primary focus of this initial study was on describing current practices. Information was collected through a series of questionnaires and interviews. The sample was made up of teacher educators, policy makers, supervisors, consultants or specialists, beginning early childhood teachers, and teachers who had taught for at least 5 years in early childhood programs. Findings from the survey included information on a wide range of topics; for this report, aspects of the study were selected that focused on the tasks of teaching in a preschool program and on the perceived needs of students in early childhood teacher education programs. Results concerned the views of each of the above groups on issues of general characteristics of teacher education programs; historical and contemporary models that have influenced the philosophy of early childhood education; major components of the teacher preparation programs; freedom for innovation for course/program designers; criteria and screening for early childhood program students; and ratings of different areas of teacher preparation. It is hoped that this preliminary study will open dialogue among Canadian educators and raise questions that will lead to program reviews and future research. (CB)

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SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS IN CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS

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Pre-service training programs for teachers of young children were surveyed across Canada in institutions where English is the language of instruction. The primary focus of this initial study was on a description of current practices.

Because of the diversity of programs the study was limited to the training programs of those teachers who will be certified to teach, among others, children in the year prior to compulsory education, generally five-year-old children.

Information was gathered in 1983-84 on the tasks of teaching in a pre-school program and on the perceived needs of students in early childhood teacher education. Information was collected through a series of questionnaires and interviews conducted in various institutions across Canada. (For comparison purposes, similar data were also collected in Australia during the spring of 1984). The sample was made up of persons involved in pre-school education: teacher educators, policy-makers, supervisors, consultants or specialists, beginning early childhood teachers, and teachers who had taught for five or more years in an early childhood program. Table 1 summarizes the sample of participants in the

study. Findings from the survey include information about the preparation, experience, and activities of teacher educators; the content of, and policies governing, teacher education programs; methods used for selection and evaluation of students in teacher education programs; the content and requirements of practicum experience; the selection and training of cooperating teachers; information about the way in which teacher education programs are planned and implemented; and research on Early Childhood education which is currently being conducted. For the purposes of this report we have selected those aspects of the study which focused on the tasks of teaching in a pre-school program and on the perceived needs of students in early childhood teacher education programs.

Some Characteristics of Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs in Canada

A. What are some of the general characteristics?

There appears to be little commonality across the country in terms of teacher education programs. No national standards exist for the selection, admission, evaluation, and graduation requirements of students expecting to become early childhood teachers. Many different professional texts are used in courses, course requirements are extremely varied, the length of the programs range from a diploma to a double degree, and skill requirements differ substantially. Programs which provide specialization in early childhood education are fairly new, but it may be important to strive for more comparability as we do in the training of elementary and secondary teachers. This is especially true, given the realities of today's job market, if we expect the teaching force to be mobile.

B. What historical and contemporary models have influenced the development of a perscnal philosophy of early childhood education?

Again, there is no overriding, common philosophy of early childhood education that appears to be operating. The historical influences (over 30 years ago) suggested most frequently were: Piaget, Montessori, Froebel, British Infant School, Dewey, and Pestalozzi. Again, in descending order, the current influences listed were: Piaget, British Infant School, Nash (O.I.S.E.), Elkind, Erikson, and Alberta Education. Overall, Piaget and the British Infant School have had the greatest influence. What these findings reveal is that traditional approaches to early childhood education play a major role in the design of teacher eduation. Analysis of comments also indicated that a large majority of all groups were not clear about the philosophical base from which they themselves were operating.

C. What are the major components of the programs to prepare early childhood education teachers?

The major emphasis in program development is in the area of practical experience. Student teaching experiences range from 20 - 120 full days, the most common being 65 - 80 days. In only 25% of the cases, however, did early childhood students spend more time student teaching than did elementary or secondary route students. This suggests, of course, that added experience at the pre-school level is at the expense of experience at upper grade levels.

A finding of some interest was that teacher educators tend to stress the need for the study of program development and child development, whereas teachers and consultants felt a greater need for knowledge related to the expressive arts and pupil assessment.

This is a traditional discrepancy in opinion which universities do not appear to have addressed.

We were also interested in perceptions about the area of computer literacy. A large proportion of respondents felt that training for teachers and children in the area was "desirable but not necessary." Our evidence generally suggests that teacher educators and other people involved in early childhood education have not yet discovered the computer and what it can do for them.

D. What freedom is there for course/program designers to be innovative?

A common complaint from Faculties of Education is that their work is often inhibited by other university bodies. This does not seem to be the case with early childhood education. While lack of funds, and therefore time and resources, are cited as problems by a few, most feel that they are quite free to proceed as they wish. The picture is not a totally rosy one, however. The real problem is one of attracting faculty members with expertise who are committed primarily to early childhood education. We found that significant numbers of professionals at every level - that is, teacher educators, consultants and teachers - had extensive experience at levels other than early childhood. As a result, they were often not clear about early childhood philosophy and program dimensions. What may suffer most during the adoption procedure is an interest in doing appropriate research, very little of which could be located. Furthermore, very few members of this group knew a great deal about early childhood programs for children or teachers in the rest of the country, but their comments indicated they would like to know more. It was obvious, then, that efforts should be made to meet the professional needs of this group.

E. What candidates are being attracted to early childhood teacher education programs?

Our data generally indicate that:

1. aside from the general university requirements for grade point average, no specific criteria were set for entry into the program;
2. where criteria are set, they usually focus on past (unspecified) experiences with children; and
3. that very little screening is being done.

Supervisory personnel do suggest that selection procedures should be based on personality variables and interpersonal skills, but to our knowledge, aside from the use of interviews, no such criteria are in place, nor do any institutions suggest how this might be done given human rights legislation presently in force.

F. How do teachers in the field rate their preparation for teaching?

The literature which specifies high priority teaching skills is extensive. After much deliberation, we selected thirteen such skills and asked various groups to indicate how well prepared beginning teachers appeared to be in this area. As demonstrated in Table 2, our conclusions were as follows:

1. Experienced teachers feel inadequately prepared in the areas of creating stimulating learning environments, observing child behaviour as a basis for program planning, communicating and working with parents, and working with other agenices for young children.
2. Inexperienced teachers share these areas of concern with

experienced teachers. The exception is that they feel competent to create a stimulating learning environment.

3. Ratings assigned to inexperienced teachers by supervisors and consultants indicate that this group feels that beginning teachers are inadequately prepared in nine of the thirteen areas listed. Their major concern lies in the areas of assessment, observation, and working with a broad range of individual differences.
4. All groups appear to be satisfied with preparation in the areas of providing direct experience, language arts, and classroom management.

While we feel that the data presented here are reasonably reliable, it should be noted that comments of experienced teachers about teacher education programs may lack validity. They certainly cannot be said to be referring to current teacher education programs because they were often older teachers with experience in other areas. We also have no way of knowing if the supervisors/consultants really reflect weaknesses in training or if they are just more critical. What does seem apparent, however, is that there is a need for teacher education institutions to look carefully at programs with a view to including additional content in the areas of major concern.

Supervisors and consultants were also asked to indicate what areas, if any, needed to be emphasized more in the pre-service teacher education program. Eleven categories and space for adding other topics were supplied. The results are presented in Table 3. According to this group, the areas of greatest concern

were: providing for individual differences, relating theory to practice, and communicating with parents. Under "other" the most common response related to observation skills. This latter response needs to be underlined because it was a common theme in a number of our free-response items. Areas of personal characteristics, attitudes, and communicating with colleagues appear to be of little concern. In fact, opinions of various groups suggested that early childhood teachers and teacher candidates were a highly motivated group.

Teachers in both groups were asked to indicate how they felt about the amount of time devoted to six specific components of the teacher education program. Ratings were on a five-point scale on which a high score would indicate that too little time had been spent on a component. The analysis of responses to this item appears in Table 4. Mean responses of over 3.0 have been underlined. Both groups feel that more time needs to be spent on student teaching, classroom observation, special education, and methods of teaching. They feel that enough or too much time is being spent on liberal arts and educational foundation subjects. Experienced teachers tended to give more negative ratings to the classroom observation and student teaching components. This difference in rating between the two groups may suggest that there has been improvement in these areas because more recent graduates have been in programs in which these components were, in fact, stressed more.

Conclusion

We have included only selected areas of our national survey in which we gathered information on the training of early childhood teachers from the perspectives of five different concerned groups. Because of our constitution that places responsibility for education with the provinces we have, in the past, had little we could call a Canadian profile of early childhood education. Communication has been difficult, not only for economic, geographic, and political reasons, but also because of the specialized vocabulary or the use we make of some words, for example, preschool, kindergarten, and primary.

Historically and currently, early childhood educators have been influenced greatly by British and American models. In addition, knowledge of children's programs, teacher education programs, and research in early childhood education is greatly lacking among Canadians.

Many respondents expressed the opinion that, where there was not a specific area of specialization in the training program, there should be one for early childhood.

If this preliminary study opens dialogue among Canadian educators and raises questions which lead to program reviews and further research it will have served a useful purpose.

Table 1

CANADIAN SAMPLE

Group	Questionnaires		Interviews
	Sent	Received	
Teacher Educators	113	64	22
Policy-Makers	12	10	10
Supervisors, Consultants	78	51	23
Experienced Teachers	135	67	0
Inexperienced Teachers	135	54	0
TOTAL	473	246	55

TABLE 2

EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Teaching Task	Respondent Group					
	Experienced Teachers N = 67		Inexperienced Teachers N = 54		Supervisors/ Consultants N = 51	
	X	s.d.	X	s.d.	X	s.d.
a. Create stimulating learning environment	3.1*	1.4	2.2	1.0	2.7	.94
b. Provide wide range of direct experience	2.3	1.2	2.3	1.1	2.9	1.0
c. Assess children's needs and progress	2.7	1.2	2.7	1.3	3.7	1.1
d. Observe child behaviour as a basis for program planning	3.3	1.8	3.0	1.9	3.9	1.1
e. Work with range of individual differences	2.9	1.3	2.8	1.3	3.7	.95
f. Facilitate integration of knowledge from different disciplines	2.3	1.2	2.7	1.1	3.2	1.0
g. Sequencing learning experiences	2.6	1.3	2.4	1.0	3.1	1.2
h. Understanding importance of language in learning	2.0	1.1	1.6	.90	2.7	1.2
i. Stimulating creative expression	2.5	1.2	2.1	1.1	3.0	1.0
j. Control and management classroom	2.4	1.4	2.5	1.7	2.5	1.1
k. Communicate and work with parents	3.3	1.3	3.2	1.5	3.2	1.1
l. Knowledge of an ability to work with educational and social services for young children	3.1	1.2	3.1	1.3	3.5	1.0
m. Ability to assess effectiveness of own teaching	2.7	1.2	2.6	1.2	3.5	1.1

*A low score indicates a positive response on a five-point scale.

TABLE 3

SUPERVISORS'/CONSULTANTS' OPINIONS RE. AREAS NEEDING MORE EMPHASIS IN E.C. TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

N = 51

Area	Frequency
a. Personal characteristics	7
b. Attitude	12
c. Communicating with children	20
d. Communicating with colleagues	6
e. Communicating with parents	30
f. Relating theory to practice	37
g. Organizational skills	21
h. Methods of teaching	19
i. Providing for individual differences	40
j. Classroom management	25
k. Evaluation, testing, etc.	21
l. Other	23

TABLE 4

TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF TIME SPENT ON COMPONENTS OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Program Component	Respondent Group			
	Experienced Teachers N = 67		Inexperienced Teachers N = 54	
	X	s.d.	X	s.d.
a. General or liberal arts	2.8	1.1	2.7	2.0
b. Foundation subjects in education	2.7	1.1	2.6	.89
c. Methods of teaching	3.3	1.2	3.5	1.3
d. Special education	3.9	1.2	3.7	1.2
e. Classroom observation	4.0	1.2	3.5	1.2
f. Student teaching	4.2	1.0	3.8	1.3